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ABSTRACT

This report describes the Educational Testing Service professional development/assessment system for student and beginning teachers, "Pathwise," a classroom observation instrument, as used in the California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) for teacher education. Three themes were noted by "Pathwise" users in the California program: (1) "Pathwise" gave all program participants a common language for discussion of teaching and learning; (2) training in understanding and recognizing criteria was an extremely valuable professional development experience; and (3) beginning teachers reported they were functioning as more experienced teachers than if they had not participated in the program. "Pathwise" supports the idea that professional development should be guided by linking teaching performance with research on teaching. It is grounded in 19 essential teaching criteria that are divided into 4 domains: organizing content knowledge for student teaching; creating an environment for student learning; teaching for student learning; and teacher professionalism. It models an active, constructivist view of learning and teaching in which life experiences and prior knowledge are important instructional resources, and it includes a multicultural perspective. It is based on the premise that teachers need to be provided with supportive feedback, generated from observation of performance based on the 19 criteria. "Pathwise" is currently in use in California and Minnesota in 18 local school districts; a number of colleges in California, Delaware, Minnesota, and Ohio also use the program. It is offered through institute training sessions nationwide and is available in 2- or 5-day sessions. (NAV)

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Euclid Assesses the California BTSA and Finds the Whole Greater than the Sum

Pathwise™ - the Educational Testing Service Component

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Pathwise - the Educational Testing Service Component

Collaboration

In 1992, Educational Testing Service (ETS) entered into an interagency collaboration with Far West Labs and a number of local school districts and colleges in California to provide assessment systems for beginning teachers. Supported by the State Department of Education and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) was designed to enhance the professional growth of beginning teachers during their induction year.

The collaboration also involves a number of colleges, which provide educational experiences geared to meeting the specific needs of the new teachers. One of the requirements for BTSA funding is that programs implement an assessment system that gives individualized support to their beginning teachers. Pathwise, the ETS professional development/assessment system for student and beginning teachers, is the classroom observation instrument chosen by a number of the programs participating in BTSA.

The number of BTSA participants using Pathwise has grown from an initial eight sites to 13 programs. In these programs, Pathwise guides the design of professional development activities for the beginning teachers. Trained observers assess beginning teachers in their own classrooms to identify areas in which teachers need improvement.

Some BTSA programs have implemented the Pathwise system, others have chosen the Far West Labs Portfolio assessment, while a number of programs have blended both types of assessment. All programs report gaining substantial benefits from the two systems, especially when used in combination.

Programs report benefits

During the years of Pathwise implementation in California, two themes have become evident from Pathwise users:

- An important benefit of using Pathwise is that it gives all BTSA program participants (beginning teachers, assessors, support providers) a common language with which to discuss teaching and learning.

- Those who have participated in Pathwise Observer Training indicate that being trained to understand and recognize the criteria is an extremely valuable professional development experience for the observers.

- Beginning teachers indicate that as a result of the California BTSA/Pathwise program, they are functioning as much more experienced teachers than they would be without the program.

Pathwise criteria for good teaching

Built on a framework of essential teaching criteria, Pathwise is based on the premise that professional development should be guided by linking teaching performance with research on teaching. Because professional development is best accomplished by a common understanding of what is expected of teachers, complete information about Pathwise is available to all involved in its use -- most importantly, those being assessed by the system -- the student teacher and the beginning teacher.

Pathwise is grounded in 19 essential teaching criteria that are based on significant research and the consensus of hundreds of practicing educators from across the country. As a way of organizing the complex world of teaching, the 19 Pathwise criteria have been divided into four domains:

- Organizing Content Knowledge for Student Teaching
- Creating an Environment for Student Learning
- Teaching for Student Learning
- Teacher Professionalism

Pathwise models an active and constructivist view of learning and teaching in which the students' life experiences and prior knowledge are regarded as important instructional resources. Because effective teaching requires a familiarity with the diversity of experience and cultural backgrounds students bring to the classroom, Pathwise is infused with a multicultural perspective.

Observer Training

Training is provided for observers to learn how to recognize performance on the 19 criteria in a range of educational settings. They learn to analyze written contextual information provided by the beginning teacher. Participants then learn to use this kind of information, combined with interviews or written reflections by the beginning teacher, to evaluate performance.

Throughout the training, participants work in a variety of mediums, including simulations, case studies, sample forms, and videotapes. As they progress through the training, participants receive continuous feedback on their work -- from the trainer, from fellow participants, and from the answer keys to the exercises. Building on the participants' professional backgrounds, the training requires them to apply their own knowledge and experiences to the assessment challenge, so that when the program is complete they are fully prepared to implement the Pathwise assessment system with beginning teachers.

Coaching system

The Pathwise system was established on the premise that teachers need to be provided with supportive feedback that is based on how the teacher has performed on the 19 criteria during an observation period. Consequently, in addition to learning how to observe for teacher performance, observer trainees learn how to provide effective feedback through specific coaching techniques.

Pathwise use

Pathwise is currently being used in California and Minnesota for beginning teacher induction programs and in a total of 18 local school districts in these two states. A number of colleges in Ohio, Minnesota, Delaware, and California have also adopted the system to use in student teacher observation.

Pathwise Institutes

Pathwise is currently being offered through institute training sessions at sites nationwide. A two-day training is offered for those who want to use the system to provide only narrative feedback to the student or beginning teachers. A five-day session is offered for those who want to use the system to provide both numerical scores and narrative feedback to the student or beginning teachers.

For further information about Pathwise, please contact Lynn Klem or Jane Retter, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ 08541. Phone: 609-951-1591. Fax: 609-951-1730: Internet: lklem@ets.org or jretter@ets.org